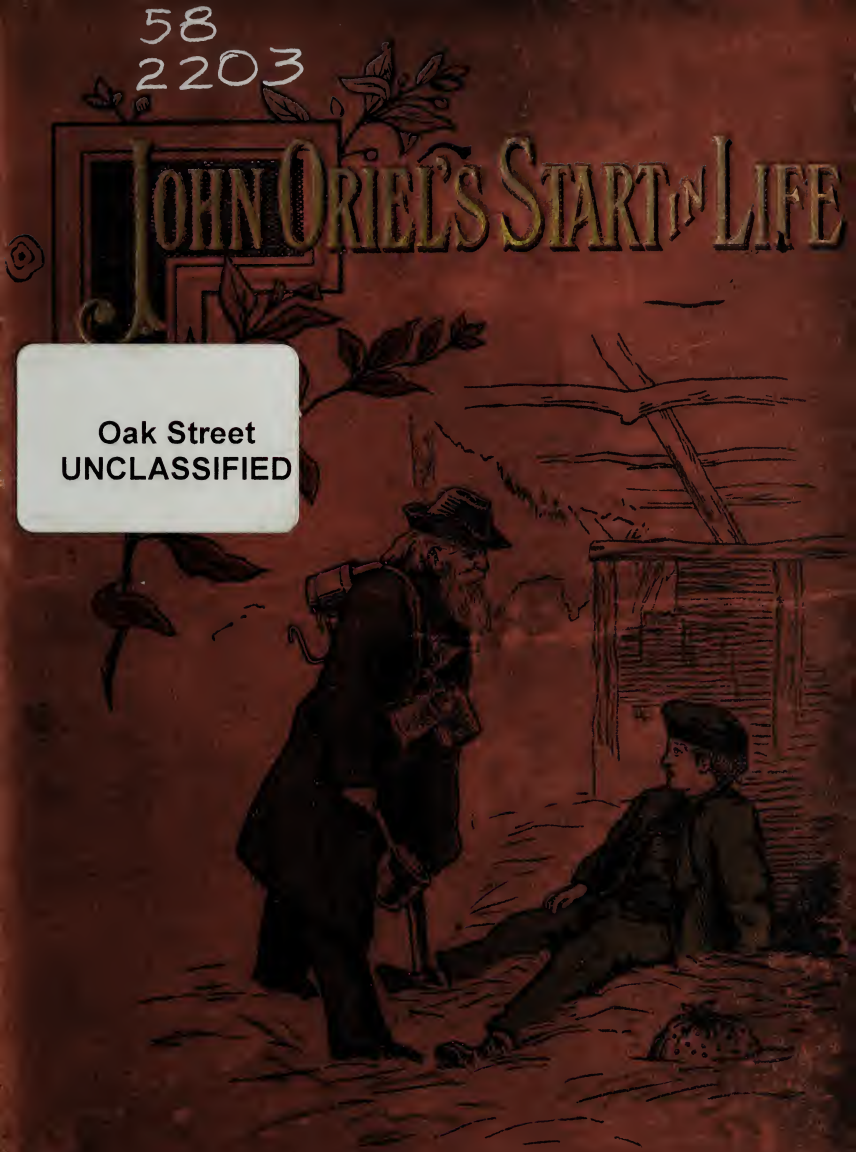
JOHN ORIEL'S START IN LIFE



MARY HOWITT

"PLEASE, SIR, DO YOU WANT A LAD?" [*p.* 24.

JOHN ORIEL'S START IN LIFE.

BY

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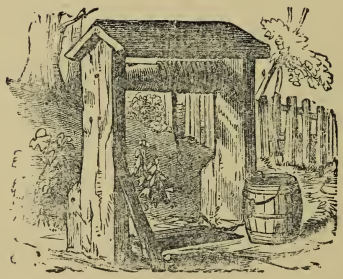
CONTENTS.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.



JOHN ORIEL'S START IN LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW JOHN LOSES HIS FIRST PLACE THROUGH A BAD SIXPENCE.

"WELL, what are you stopping for? Haven't you got your money?" demanded Mr. North, the greengrocer, from the lad whom he had hired on Monday morning to help in the shop, and who now, having received two shillings and sixpence for his week's wages, still lingered, with the money in his hand, as if unsatisfied.

Mr. North was smarting under the information that his best customer had transferred his favours to the rival greengrocer at the bottom of the street; therefore he was out of humour, and the wistful face of the poor, meagre lad was the last drop to the already overflowing cup of his vexation.

"What are you stopping here for?" again he demanded, with angry impatience.

"If you please, sir, do look at this sixpence. I don't think it's good," said the lad, very anxious, and sadly afraid of displeasing the employer over whom they had rejoiced so much, and who had been so hard to find, and he timidly put forth the suspicious coin.

This was another drop into the full cup of vexation, for the greengrocer knew that he had taken a bad sixpence that week; but it could not be this one, because he remembered showing it to his wife and seeing her put it with the other bad money in an old teapot in the corner cupboard. The idea of a second bad sixpence was more than he could bear just then, and, refusing to look at it, he pushed the lad out of the shop, telling him that he need not come on Monday.

This was a blow indeed. The poor fellow's heart—and he was only twelve years old—sank down, as it were, into his very shoes. It was a greater misfortune even than the bad sixpence.

He lingered at the door, urgently repeating, "Please, sir," till, for crying, he could not say another word.

By this time the shop-door was barred, the gas was out, and Mr. North seated at his comfortable Saturday supper of tripe, onion sauce, and baked potatoes, in the warm, well-furnished kitchen behind the shop.

Never was poor lad more thoroughly cut down

than our John Oriel at this moment. And that you may understand why he was so, and who they were that had rejoiced with him over the place which it was hoped he had now, in the middle of November, obtained for the whole winter, I will tell you, whilst he is going slowly homewards, as briefly as I can.

John was an orphan, without a relative known to himself in the world. His home was in the pleasant suburban village of Hampstead, with people who were excessively poor, and at the present time distressed beyond measure. They lived in a wretched dwelling consisting of two rooms and a lean-to, in what is called Taylor's Yard, a damp, dirty little court, into which ran drainage from all sides, and which was choked up with old, broken, weather-beaten carts and other dilapidated wheeled vehicles, the worthless refuse of an adjoining wheelwright's yard.

By name they were Elliot, the man—a bricklayer by trade—his wife, and three children. Other children there had been, but the eldest and youngest died six years ago of typhus fever, which the father also took. This fever was always looked back to as the beginning of their sorrows. Elliot till then had had regular work, but he fell out of it at that time, and never afterwards seemed to recover it, and, what is still worse, took to drinking, and thus introduced a permanent sorrow and sure source of poverty into the family.

The wife, a clean, tidy woman, very clever with

her fingers, and affectionate in disposition, had lived in good places before her marriage, and was proud of having her home not only clean, but smart, with muslin curtains in the windows, a carpet on the floor, and a looking-glass and pictures on the walls.

Now and then in those prosperous days she would take in a lodger; hence it happened, that shortly after the birth of her second child she received into her house a friendless stranger, a poor young woman of the name of Oriel, who had come to London from Guernsey on her way to Canada. A series, however, of most disastrous circumstances had fallen out for her. They encountered a fearful storm on the passage from the Channel Islands. Several lives were lost, some of them passengers, and most of the luggage was lost also, amongst the rest, that of Mrs. Oriel. As it unfortunately happened, her name was telegraphed to London as one who had perished: the person, therefore, who was appointed to meet her, made no effort to do so, but simply reported the sorrowful news to her husband.

She, in the meantime, arrived in London, ill from the disastrous voyage, and fortunately falling in with a kindly Samaritan, who pitied her condition, she was directed to Mrs. Elliot, then living in a comfortable little house at Clapham.

Mrs. Elliot had a sympathetic heart. The stranger's story was very sad: her husband had

emigrated to Canada three months before. Now, all being ready for her, he was impatient for her to go over. He had sent her money, and she was on her way to him. She was pleasing in countenance, and her manners were those of a respectable young woman of the lower class.

Mrs. Elliot took to her at once, as though she had been her sister. There was no time, however, for any personal knowledge, nor even for the most needful information to be obtained from her, for two days after her arrival she died, leaving a new-born orphan child.

As to the poor woman herself, she had been so stunned by the suddenness of her sorrows as to lose consciousness; although she appeared, by a sad, sweet look of intelligence, to acknowledge the pious labours of the Rev. Joshua Wiltshire, an earnest minister, whose place of worship Mrs. Elliot attended, and whom she had summoned to the dying woman as soon as she was aware that her end was at hand.

She was now dead, and not even the name of the place whence she came, nor of that to which she was bound in Canada, were known. Had there been a necessity to have applied to the parish on behalf of the motherless child, some public steps would have been taken for this purpose. As it was, however, Mrs. Elliot, who had herself a baby not six weeks old, declared her wish to take charge of the infant; and as money was left belonging to the mother, after the funeral

expenses were paid, besides a little clothing, her wedding-ring, and gold earrings, Elliot himself, who, more than his wife, had an eye to his own advantage, made no objection.

Amongst the poor deceased woman's few possessions was found a small Bible, on the front page of which was written in a good, clear hand—

"*John Oriel, to his dear Jane, on their wedding day,*"

with a date somewhat about twelve months before. Mr. Wiltshire, therefore, now entered the birth of the infant, which was christened John, on the same page, together with the mother's death, and their respective dates. The book was then placed with the mother's clothes, her wedding-ring and earrings, to be preserved as heirlooms for the identification of the child whenever his father or others might turn up to claim him.

The Wiltshires, who thought highly of Mrs. Elliot, never lost sight of her as long as she remained in their neighbourhood, which was till after the sad visitation of typhus fever, when that downward career began for the whole family, which finally brought them into Taylor's Yard.

Mrs. Elliot's second child, little Dick, was six weeks old when she took the motherless baby to her bosom as his foster-brother. Dick was a large-limbed, robust child, endowed with an iron constitution. Johnny, on the contrary, was delicate and fragile. At length the little flame of life began to burn freely, and as the child grew

he became singularly beautiful—a delicate-limbed, sunny-haired, bright-countenanced child, all intelligence and affection.

At the time of the fever Mrs. Wiltshire took John, then six years old, out of danger to her own house, and such a wonderful time of enjoyment began for him there as he never forgot.

They were not rich people, but lived in a small, pretty house in the midst of a large garden, so that, though attached to a large and populous suburb, it had an open and countrified look, which, to the child, represented the Garden of Eden, as shown in Mrs. Elliot's picture Bible.

So now here he was brought into a house that looked to him beautiful, with carpets on all the floors, and handsome mahogany furniture, rubbed till you could see your face in it; a kitchen with bright, shining ware hung round, which looked like silver; and a large garden full of apple-trees laden with red and yellow apples, just like those in the picture Bible, and flowers without end, and the large cat basking in the sun under the old rosemary bush. It was delightful! Sometimes he helped to gather beans or peas, which he afterwards helped to shell for dinner; sometimes he helped Mrs. Wiltshire to tie up the flowers, or to gather their now ripening seed; and sometimes he weeded the nice gravel walks.

Now and then, also, he was allowed to sit with Mrs. Wiltshire in the large summer-house in the garden, where she and other ladies knitted stockings

and made clothing for poor children. When she was alone she would desire him to read passages to her out of her little New Testament, which always lay in her work-basket.

One beautiful afternoon, when he had tired himself with making a little daisy-garden behind the summer-house, and he seemed hot and rather fretful, she called him to her, and after she had sung to him some sweet little hymns, which were cheerful and pleasant, she asked him to read her a few verses from her little Testament.

All his peevishness was gone ; he rose up from the step of the summer-house, where he had sat down, and took out the little Testament.

"Read just where it opens, my child," she said, "for the Lord often gives us thus the bread of His divine table according to our needs."

The boy opened the book as he was told, and he began to read where his eye first fell, at the thirty-third verse of the sixth chapter of St. Mark, where the multitude followed the Lord into the desert place, and so on, till he came to the thirty-ninth.

"And He commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass."

"No, no," said Mrs. Wiltshire, rather sharply : "attend to what you read, Johnny. You are thinking of something else. Not *green* grass. Attend to the book, please."

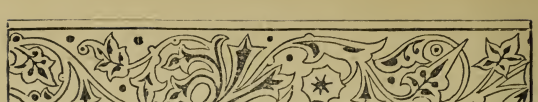
He read it a second time, thinking, of course, he must be wrong in some way or other. He read very slowly, word by word—

"And He commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass."

"Bless me!" she said, in perfect astonishment. "So often as I have read that, and never saw it before. Yes, the *green* grass. You are right, my dear. Now go on. Only when you see green grass remember how the Lord fed the multitude in the desert, and how He will lead those that love Him to the green pastures."

As she thus spoke to him a deep love filled her heart. She recalled instantly his motherless condition and the circumstances of his birth.

From this moment a deep and affectionate solicitude for the child took possession of her heart. She heard him read daily, instructed him carefully in his religious duties, young as he was, and having an affectionate, winning way with her, and being a woman of sincere, simple, childlike faith, her instructions sank deep into his youthful heart. She intended henceforth never to lose sight of him, and, above all, to bear him constantly in her prayers.



CHAPTER II.

HOW THINGS GOT WORSE AND WORSE AT THE ELLIOTS'.

WHEN all danger of infection was over, Johnny went back to his foster-parents. Elliot, who had been at the Fever Hospital, was now home again, but two children were dead. It was late in the autumn, and he had no more work the whole of that winter.

Now began the downward course of the poor family. Early in the year a prospect of work took Elliot to the other side of London, and thither, before long, the family followed him.

But we will not be too minute in telling this dismal part of the story. Johnny went with Mrs. Elliot to bid the excellent minister and his wife good-bye, and received a winter supply of warm stockings and comfortable clothing of that good woman's making; and in parting with the child she kissed him, and enjoined him, if ever he were in want of help, to ask it of God, his loving Father in heaven, and so always to act as to be able to go with his trouble to God, let it be what it might.

Mrs. Elliot cried in bidding the minister's wife good-bye ; but did not say a word about what was saddest of all to her—that her husband, since the fever, had shown an increasing love of drink, and that when under its influence he was a different man, and seemed to have taken a dislike to Johnny, and things had begun to go so badly with them. She would like to have told her all this, but true wifely affection, and unwillingness to disgrace her husband in the eyes of those who had respected him, kept her silent.

Six years went on. Dick and his foster-brother were twelve.

Johnny had never been to see the Wiltshires again, and if they had desired to see him he would have been hard to find. The Elliots had gone on from bad to worse. The husband was one of those who find it harder to do right and to keep right in adversity than prosperity. He could not stand up against unsuccess. Once down, always down with him.

In the meantime the family must live, and as it is mostly the case that the deteriorated character of the husband operates on the wife and children, so it was here. The once clean and tidy and even well-dressed Mrs. Elliot looked now forlorn, and sometimes dirty. She was disheartened and hopeless, and had often not a penny to call her own, much less to provide decent clothing for herself and the children.

They had, besides, been of late years like rolling stones, moving from one dwelling to another, each

worse than the last, and with much less to put in it, for now everything had been parted with but the barest necessities ; and, having bought a second-hand mangle, which was not yet fully paid for, were living, as I said before, in the miserable dwelling in Taylor's Yard.

It was now the beginning of November. Again Elliot had no work. Often he is at the public-house. When he is at home he sits sullenly by the fire.

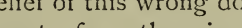
The only comfort poor Mrs. Elliot had was when employed to do charing-work in other people's houses, and thus have something to make clean and wholesome, which was still sweetly natural to her, though her own dwelling was so comfortless.

Dick, Johnny's foster-brother, now a big, strong lad, had been since Michaelmas in service at a cowkeeper's. He was no longer a burden at home, and he seldom came near them. The last time Johnny saw him he had new boots on, and leather leggings, and looked quite like a man. Harriet, the girl, who came next to Dick, looked after the house and the mangle when her mother was out. Johnny turned the mangle, and found it dreadfully hard work, for he was far from strong.

Poor Johnny had long since come to know that he was properly not one of the family, and the threat of being turned out of doors, to say nothing of blows, which were often dealt him by Elliot in the brutal frenzy of his drunkenness, made his young life miserable. His foster-mother, however, was still true to him, and stood between him and the

brutality of her husband ; but though she could do thus much at home for the boy, she could not prevent his evil drinking-and-skittle-playing associates from strengthening more and more his ill-will to the lad, who, though fed and housed by him, had no natural claim upon him. It was in vain that she pleaded on his behalf the blessing which Mr. Wiltshire had assured them God would send down upon them for befriending the orphan. Elliot had ceased to have any faith in such promises or prospects. He had lost faith both in God and man.

In all this miserable shipwreck of life nothing could abate the foster-mother's fidelity to the child. Hence, though she had parted with everything of value belonging to herself, the little property of clothes and trinkets which remained as a precious heirloom to the child was still safe. But she had saved them as from the fire. The clothes, which otherwise Elliot might have pawned or sold, were now sewn into the covering of a mattress, and the wedding-ring and earrings she always carried about her in a little nutmeg-grater. Elliot had been deceived by some means into the idea that all had been pawned or turned wholly into money long ago ; and, to do him justice, in his better moments the belief of this wrong done to the lad caused him regret, for otherwise he might fail of the means of identification, should his father or friends ever turn up.



CHAPTER III.

JOHNNY LOOKS OUT FOR A PLACE.

NOVEMBER this year was cold, raw, and damp, Johnny's clothes were thin; he had not strong boots and leggings like Dick, and his feet were miserably tormented with chilblains. His bed was on the mangle, and not so uncomfortable either, in comparison with the cold, damp lean-to, on the floor of which he must otherwise have slept. He had a little old bolster, a little old blanket, and an old piece of Brussels carpet as a coverlet, over which he laid his clothes.

It was Saturday night. Elliot had had a job of work that week, and was now drinking by the public-house fire. Mrs. Elliot, who had been out all day, came home rather late, and then had her washing to do. Those at home had been mangling all the afternoon, and Johnny was so tired he knew not how to keep his eyes open. At half-past ten, Mrs. Elliot's work being done, she went to bed. Harriet and little Stephen, who slept in the same chamber, had been gone some time; but

poor Johnny must sit up till Elliot came home, a match-box and candle being set on the mangle-foot to light him to bed. The door was locked, and he must let him in.

Johnny's feet were a perfect torment to him. His foster-mother told him, therefore, to sit down on a low wooden stool by the fire, which she would leave in the grate for him, and rub his feet with salt, which she had heard was good for them. Johnny rubbed his smarting, tingling feet. The fire was warm, and soon he was fast asleep, sitting there with his foot in his hand ; how long I cannot say, but long enough for Elliot to come home, who, trying the door, and finding it locked, began to knock, and make a great riot outside. Mrs. Elliot, who was not asleep, came down instantly, with her cloak over her head and her bare feet, surmising instantly that Johnny had dropped fast asleep.

Poor lad! He was speedily roused up by a heavy blow on the side of his head, which knocked him from the stool to the floor. Elliot was not so drunk but that he could see whose neglect it was that had kept him waiting at the door.

What a miserable night that was! Johnny, sleepy as he had been, now lay for hours crying in his bed on the mangle. He had no idea that he should ever be so unhappy as he then was. He began to think that he would run away—go to sea or anywhere. At length he fell asleep—and woke. The dreadful night had at last come to an end ;

but that it was not a dream he knew too well, because he felt so sore all over.

Elliot got up very late, and was silent and sullen. In the afternoon he went out, and came back about nine. But he said not a word to Johnny.

Next morning his foster-mother told him—for Elliot, whose work was not yet finished, left as soon as it was light—that he must try and get a place. She talked very cheerfully to him, gave him a better breakfast than usual, and was evidently preparing to send him off at once. She cut some slices of bread and a nice little piece of broiled bacon—a portion of some broken victuals which had been given her on Saturday, but none of which had made their appearance on Sunday—together with a piece of cold rice-pudding, all of which she laid temptingly together and wrapped in a bit of paper for his dinner. She smiled and seemed so good-tempered, but all the while her heart was as heavy as lead, and it was all she could do to keep from crying.

Johnny smiled too, for he felt how kind it was. Stephen wanted some pudding. "Give him a bit, mother," he said, and took the knife out of her hand, and, dividing it, gave half to Stephen. Then he burst out crying himself as if his heart would break.

"My poor, dear lad, don't cry so!" exclaimed Mrs. Elliot, clasping him in her arms, and now crying in her turn.

Then brightening up again, for she thought it never would do to be so soft-hearted, she again began to talk cheerfully about getting a nice place, and having a good dinner every day. Then, giving him the food in the paper, she said she would go out that morning and mention it at all the houses where she worked, and she was sure between them they should manage to get a nice place for him.

Johnny could not help feeling the cheering influence of his foster-mother's words. He took the parcel of food she had prepared, which he put in his pocket.

Johnny had a brave heart, and if he had not felt sore with the ill-usage of Saturday night, and if his swollen feet had not hurt him so, he would have set out on this hunt for good fortune as cheerfully as any lad in London. As it was, he felt down-hearted, when all at once, as if by contrast to his present condition, he thought of that summer's day when he read about the green grass to Mrs. Wiltshire, and then her words came back to him—"Always pray to the blessed Saviour when you are in trouble." He thought that certainly now was the time if ever, and he was sure that the Lord could help him. And as he went along he said inwardly, as if speaking to his Saviour, "O Lord! do please to give me a place. Let somebody want a lad like me!"

"Do you please to want a boy?" asked he at

almost every shop which he passed, walking on towards London. Nobody wanted one, and the truth was, that he looked so poor and shabby, so half-starved and wistful, that the first thought of every one was, that he was not strong enough for work. Some said so, more or less kindly; others answered him sharply, and sent him off.

At length he had gone two miles, and began again to be sadly disheartened and weary, when he came to the corner shop of a greengrocer, over which, in large blue and gold letters, was the name NORTH. Mr. North, a man in a dark-blue woollen apron, was taking in a quantity of fine turnips, carrots, and other winter vegetables from a cart, and Mrs. North was placing very lemon-coloured oranges on a slanting stage outside in the window.

Johnny stopped. "Please, sir, do you want a lad?" he asked, as usual.

Mr. North looked down as from an immense height, and said, in a rather kindly voice, "But you are not good for anything."

"Yes, sir, please I am," replied Johnny, briskly, for he instantly detected encouragement in the greengrocer's disparaging words.

Mrs. North looked up from her oranges, and saw the thin, anxious young face. She had lost a little son about Johnny's age some years before, and some fancied resemblance brought his dying expression back to her heart, and she said, speaking very cheerfully:

"I'll be bound to say he'll do. Come in and have a bit of breakfast. He'll do, never fear, Sammy," said she, addressing her husband, and then, coming forward and motioning with her hand for the boy to follow her, led him into a warm, comfortable kitchen, where a girl was washing up the breakfast things.

She was a stout woman, with a rosy face and double chin, and seemed to fill the doorways as she went in and out. Johnny watched her movements. There seemed to him something grand and large about her. If she had been a little woman he would have thanked her, and said that he had his dinner with him; but as it was he was silent, sitting on the comfortable cushioned chair which she offered him, and then ate with the liveliest relish a piece of cold kidney-pudding and some bread and cheese which she gave him. He thought he had never eaten anything so good in his life, and now he could carry back the delicious food he had in his pocket for Stephen.

He was to have his dinner every day and half-a-crown a week. This was what they offered him, and he thought it would make him quite rich. True, he would have two miles to walk morning and evening there and back, and a good deal of running about in the day. But nothing daunted him, and he returned home joyfully at night with the good news, and his foster-mother and Harriet and little Stephen rejoiced greatly with him. Elliot himself, who was very low, as usual,

after his drunken bout, grumbled also his satisfaction.

The week went on. Elliot's job of work was finished, and he was again either at home smoking in the chimney corner or at the skittle-ground.

A second outbreak of brutal violence on the part of Elliot, and her own inability to obtain a place for the boy amongst her employers, determined Mrs. Elliot to take a step which she had long meditated. This was to apply to Mr. Wiltshire on his behalf, and, if possible, to get him placed under that good man's care. She would, in all probability, have carried out this plan long ago, but more than six years had elapsed since she left the neighbourhood where those kind people had known her under such different circumstances. She had sadly gone down in the world since then, and was so ashamed of her present abject circumstances that nothing but the well-being, and it might be the very life of the child, whom she loved as her own, would have induced her to act upon it.

The question, however, in the first place, was, should she go with him on Monday morning down to the greengrocer, induce Mr. North to look at the bad sixpence, and so, as was only right, get him reinstated; or should she send him to Mr. Wiltshire, to whom Johnny himself could tell his own story? Finally, this last step was decided on, the good foster-mother hoping that in this way his interests would be most effectually served.

Had they gone down to the greengrocer's, however, I must just tell you what kind of reception they would have had. And to do so, we must go back to the Saturday night when Mr. and Mrs. North were seated comfortably at their savoury supper. No sooner had the cheery warmth of the fireside and the food of which he was so fond begun to circulate through the strong frame of Mr. North, than his ill-humour subsided.

"Well, I must say I'm sorry for one thing I've done to-night," said he, slapping his knee; "I hate laying up vexation for Sunday."

"Why, what has ta gone and done, Sammy?" asked his wife, who was a midland-county woman, and still adhered to her native dialect when in the kitchen with her husband.

"Why, I've sent that little chap away for good. He came bothering me about his money just when they told me Evans's were gone to those new folks. But I *did* give you that bad sixpence I took on Thursday, didn't I, Sarah?" added he, wishful to justify himself.

"No, that ta didn't. I never saw it," said Mrs. North. "Thou said thou'd got one, and 'ud bring it to put i' th' oud tea-pot; but I niver saw it."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed the conscience-stricken man. "Then I do believe that poor lad was right! Why, I never did such a thing before. Where does he live?"

"Eh, I don't know," said Mrs. North. "But

he'll be here o' Monday, and then we'll ma' it all right."

The greengrocer pushed himself and his chair farther back, as if he felt himself unworthy to sit at the table. "Nay, but," he exclaimed, "I told him I wouldn't have him again."

"Thou art so over-hasty, Sammy. That's just thy way! I know na where he lives; somewhere in Hampstead. He was the best lad we've iver had, and I'd got two or three things together for him, if he was good over next week. And then to give him bad money, and send him off!"

"Oh, well, well," said the greengrocer, feeling every word his wife said like a little stab to his conscience. "Lads are not so blate. He'll be coming again. I'll keep a sharp look-out on Monday."

Mrs. North thought, as her husband did, that Johnny would come and try to get into the place again; so she went to bed, and slept comfortably. On Monday both she and her husband kept a sharp look-out. But they never saw him; nor could they learn anything about him from the neighbours. Towards the middle of the week, therefore, they hired another lad; but neither Mr. nor Mrs. North could forget the wrong which had been done him.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHNNY SETS OFF TO FIND A FRIEND, AND MEETS WITH WHAT NOBODY EXPECTED.

A WEEK of ineffectual effort on the part of Johnny and his foster-mother to find a place for him, and that second drunken outbreak of her husband's, determined the poor woman that her foster-son should not remain another night in the house.

A friendly neighbour therefore took him in till she had got a few things ready. She said nothing to her husband of her intentions, fearing lest he should put some impediment in the way, rather than have his downward course known to those who were acquainted with him in his better days. When, however, the lad was once safely under the protection of those good people she felt as if she would care for nothing.

On Monday, therefore, she washed his few poor things, afterwards mending them, and even cutting up some of her own garments, which she could very ill spare, that Mrs. Wiltshire might not surmise the extreme poverty to which they were

reduced. On Thursday the little preparations were complete. He was well washed, his hair carefully brushed, his shoes had been patched, and with a new scarlet and white comforter round his neck, and a pair of warm woollen gloves on his hands, the gift of the good woman who had housed him, for she was several degrees better off than Mrs. Elliot, he was ready for his departure.

Elliot, fortunately, was at work; and leaving little Stephen and the key of the house, in case the mangle should be wanted, in charge of the friendly neighbour, Harriet and poor Mrs. Elliot, carrying Johnny's little bundle pinned up in an old blue handkerchief under her shawl, walked a mile or so with him, to set him on his way in this, which seemed to her such a momentous step. Johnny did not look at it half as seriously as she did.

She, on the other hand, was very sad and anxious. Now that the time was come to ask those good people, who were mountains high, as it were, above her in prosperity, to befriend her in her need, to make known to them her poverty and her helplessness seemed such a sad humiliation, that, but for the true mother-love that warmed her heart for the lad, and the hope that some good might come to him out of it, she would have been inclined to give up the enterprise.

"And now, Johnny," she said, after they had walked a little way in silence, "mind that you don't tell Mrs. Wiltshire more than you can help

about father: he is not himself when he's in drink; and he's never been the strong man he was since he had the fever. Remember to give my duty to Mrs. Wiltshire, and tell her I'd have gone myself long ago to see her and ask her advice, for, oh! I've wanted a friend this many a year;" and then Mrs. Elliot began to cry. Presently, however, she wiped her eyes with the corner of her shawl, and taking Johnny's hand, said, "And you'll be sure and let me know how you go on. If they keep you a bit, as I dare say they will, or get you a place, you'll be sure to write. Mrs. Wiltshire will understand how I shall want to know what they say, and what they can do for you. You're ready to work, John; you'll do any manner of work they set you. Eh! I do hope they'll let you stop a bit," said the poor woman, with a terrible anxiety lest by any chance this beautiful scheme should fail them. Then again she went on, "You know exactly the way, Johnny; you won't lose yourself. But it's a long way. But you can take a twopenny 'bus, as'll set you down pretty near, and then which way do you go, Johnny?"

He had learned this lesson off by heart, for she had examined him over and over again in it; and as he answered satisfactorily, and remembered the house so well, with its white gate in front and pretty garden, her mind was easy. "I wish I could give you more money, Johnny, but I've only sevenpence halfpenny, and Harriet, she's put fourpence to it, so it makes elevenpence halfpenny. That'll

take you there, and bring you back, if so must be. But, please God, I hope not."

Johnny was very unwilling to take the money, but they forced it upon him. "But I'll bring it back," said he, "if I don't stop; I can walk all the way."

"And you've got your mother's things safe, haven't you?" again began the anxious woman.

Johnny laid his hand on his side-pocket, into which his foster-mother had stitched the little nutmeg-grater.

"All right," said John.

"And ask Mrs. Wiltshire to keep them for you; they'll be safer with her than with me," continued she; "and your Bible's in your bundle; and don't forget your prayers, Johnny."

After this they fell into silence. Then Mrs. Elliot stopped; she kissed Johnny, and so did Harriet. They were both ready to cry, but they kept up. He was still brave-hearted; but nevertheless a very little would have made him cry outright. However, he didn't; and, after looking back many times, they were out of each other's sight.

Johnny walked on and on. Now and then he asked his way; but he was a sharp, clear-headed lad, and never went very far wrong.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when he began to feel himself approaching suburban London, on the Surrey side. It was in the London Road, Clapham, that the goal of all his hopes lay.

He began to remember familiar objects of his childish days, for his foster-mother lived in a little street which opened into the London Road, and Mr. Wiltshire's place of worship was somewhere near at hand. Yes, there it was! But it was some way different: there was a new wall in front, and a deodar planted in the grass on each side of the broad middle walk up to the middle door. He stopped and read the announcement, painted in gold letters on the board which stood before the left-hand deodar:—"Services at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Minister, the Rev. Thomas Baxter."

This struck through his heart like a knife. Was Mr. Wiltshire dead? That was his first idea. He felt sorely troubled. The minister's house was half a mile further up the road, just on the edge of the common. Presently he came to it. It was the same, and yet different. A young woman, with a child in a perambulator, was just turning in at the gate.

"Please, miss," said the lad very timidly, and afraid to hear the answer, "does Mr. Wiltshire live here?"

"Oh, no," said the housemaid; "it's Mr. Lowndes, the lawyer."

"And where, then, does Mr. Wiltshire live?' demanded Johnny.

"I never heard of such a person," she said; "but we've only lived here two months. You'd better inquire at some of the shops."

He walked slowly away, feeling as if everything

in the world had become very dark. He went down the road till he came near the place of worship, and here shops began on the opposite side of the road. He saw a stout, good-natured looking butcher at his door, and crossed over to make the inquiry.

"Please, sir," asked he, "can you tell me where Mr. Wiltshire lives?"

"Wiltshire?" replied the man; "I don't know such a person, my lad."

There was a woman inside the shop buying a mutton-chop from the butcher's wife. "Do you know anybody named Wiltshire, Mrs. Shaw?" asked he, turning in.

"Not as lives here now," she replied; "but Mr. Wiltshire used to preach at the place of worship over the way."

"I mean him, please," said Johnny, eagerly.

"Oh, aye; but he doesn't live here now. It's three years, I should think, since he left."

"It must be that," put in the butcher; "for I've been here two years, and Mr. Baxter's been the minister ever since I knowed the place."

Boys don't faint, but of a truth our poor lad felt ready to drop.

His mouth all at once seemed very dry, but he said, with as much power as he could command, "Please, mem, where is he now?"

"Oh, he went to Manchester or Birmingham, or one of those big towns. He was a very good preacher, by all I've heard say."

Johnny turned away. His heart seemed to have died within him. He had not power to think what he was to do next, but mechanically walked up the long London road again till he was in sight of that paradise of his childhood, and so on to the common, where he sat down, cold and dreary as it was—for now it was between three and four o'clock —and cried as if his heart would break.

As he began to feel very cold and desolate, he got up and walked on, not across the common, but down the side of it, where building was going on, and where were a few stray shops. He bought a refuse twopenny loaf at a baker's for a penny, and began to eat, for he was hungry. He had not the faintest idea what was best for him to do. He felt as if he had not a friend in the world, so he rambled on and on. Just as night was coming down, and he could see the lines of gas shining in the distant streets, he found himself at the edge of open fields, but the fences of which were cut down and new roads laid out, and farther on, brown fields and great red heaps of clay burning for ballast or for material for roads, the blue smoke of which ascended into the grey twilight, and a thick, choky smell filled the atmosphere.

He went on, following a little path which led amongst the smoking heaps, for he now thought he would pass the night here; and accordingly, coming upon a little wooden shed, in which the brickmakers took their meals, he entered it, and to his satisfaction found a quantity of hay on the

floor. It was very nearly dark, but still light enough for him to make this discovery. But scarcely had he done so when he was aware that he was not alone. An old man with very long white hair on his shoulders and a show-white beard, which shone out distinctly in the darkness, was at the door, having, as it appeared, come up from the opposite side. He had a quantity of tin-ware in his hand, which also looked white, like his hair and beard.

"Could one sleep here for a night, please, master?" asked Johnny, thinking it civil to say something.

"Oh, aye, if you've no better lodging," said the old man, entering, "and if we can agree about it;" and so saying he set down his tin wares in a corner of the shed, and, taking out a match-box, lighted a candle, which he stuck in a piece of wet clay on the wall.

Johnny now saw that he had a withered leg, supported at the knee by a crutch, and that his appearance was very venerable and picturesque.

"Let's look at you, lad," said the old man, taking hold of his arm, and pulling him towards the candle. Then, having satisfied his curiosity, he pushed him back, asked him if he wanted his supper, and told him he might stop there, and that he would find hay enough for his bed besides what he himself required.

The old man seated himself on a few bricks which had evidently served the purpose of a seat

"COULD ONE SLEEP HERE FOR A NIGHT, PLEASE, MASTER?"

before then, and, slinging a dirty canvas bag from his shoulder, began to look over his victuals, besides which a small bottle made its appearance, from which he took a draught every now and then. In the meantime he pressed his companion to partake with him; but Johnny, who was so distressed in his mind, had no appetite; besides, the old man's victuals looked to him so unsightly that he could not have eaten them if he would.

The old man laughed and was merry. "I'm better off than you, anyhow, my lad," said he, "for I can eat my supper."

Johnny made no reply, but, unable longer to control his feelings, began to cry as if his heart would break.

"Well, what is it?" asked the old man, not unkindly, when the boy's grief seemed a little over.

It was a relief to have somebody to tell his troubles to, so he said he was an orphan, and that he had gone that day to see some good people, whom he thought would be kind to him, but they were gone a long way off, and now he did not know what to do; and again he was ready to cry.

The old man, whose supper was now ended, shook up his bed, and telling his companion to do the same by his, blew out the candle, saying, if anybody had seen the light he should have got into trouble; and they could talk just as well in the dark.

Johnny did not quite like it, and he felt half afraid, especially when the old man asked him if he had any money, and what he had in his bundle

He told him that he had tenpence-halfpenny, and these were his two or three things; and he kept his hand on the nutmeg-grater, as if to hold it fast, but said not a word about it. The old man then said he was sorry for him, and he thought he could help him nicely. He went up and down the suburbs with tin-ware, toasting-forks and skewers, and such things, and made a nice little trade of it. Folks gave him broken victuals: he was well known up and down, and often made as much as two shillings a day. Now, if Johnny would join him—as a grandchild, say, an orphan, his father had died at sea, for folks liked a touching story—he wouldn't mind paying him sixpence a day. He couldn't get as good a place as that.

Johnny said he wouldn't mind trying, only he wouldn't tell any stories. He wouldn't mind trying a day or a week.

The old man said, "A bargain!" took another draught from his bottle, and lay down in the hay.

He was soon asleep. Johnny could hear his heavy breathing. For himself, he felt too unhappy, and the circumstances in which he was placed were too perplexing for him to go to sleep, tired though he was.

He lay down in the hay, however, as far away from the old man as he could, and in thought went back to the heavenly time when he was a child, and sat with Mrs. Wiltshire in the summer-house, and read to her about the blessed Saviour feeding the multitude in the desert.

CHAPTER V.

JOHNNY BEGINS A NEW TRADE.

ALMOST before it was daylight the old man summoned Johnny. It was time to be off, he said; and the boy rose from amongst the hay out of the deep sleep in which he had lain, and, remembering the compact of the night before, felt the utmost disinclination to act upon it. But he did not dare to refuse. Besides, what else was there for him to do?

The old man had a greasy, unwholesome look by daylight, spite of snow-white hair and beard. He had little ferret eyes, that seemed to prick into the lad like pins; and, after all, it was not an old face: there were no fitting wrinkles to match with the snowy, venerable hair and beard. Johnny felt an instinctive dislike to him, and thought he would run away. And so he would have done if he had known where to run to. Whilst he was meditating thus with regard to his companion, the old man, who told him to carry the bundle of skewers and toasting-forks, was taking him to an

early eating-house somewhere near Chelsea, where he ordered for both of them a tolerable breakfast of hot coffee and muffins. The charge was tenpence, and this the old man desired Johnny to pay, saying he would give it him again as soon as they had taken any money.

As soon as breakfast was finished they began their tramp. Johnny carried the lighter wares made of wire, and the old man those of tin. They walked for an hour before they offered anything for sale, the old man saying he was known in those parts. At length they were at Kensington, and began their trade. They always went to back doors—to the kitchen door, if possible. Johnny was sent in first, and readily sold some of his skewers and a couple of toasting forks. Generally speaking, however, the fat, comfortable cooks in large, well-furnished kitchens sent him away with angry words, calling him beggar and tramp, or threatening him with the dog. But now and then it was different: he was called a pretty lad; the old man's story was listened to; and if the remains of breakfast or luncheon were standing about, probably the leg of a fowl, a piece of cold bacon, or cold toast would be given him, some little of which he ate, but the greater part went into the old man's bag. He felt he was a pauper. He never knew what it was to be humiliated before. He could not bear it; and if it had not been for the remembrance that the old man had his money, he would certainly have thrown the undertaking up at once.

The old man was in capital spirits. Johnny had told him in the beginning that he would not be called his grandson, nor should he say that his father had died at sea; but that he should make it known to all that he was a friendless orphan whom he had picked up, and who was going half-shares in his trade; he could not help his saying, however, much as he might dislike it.

The old man had his bag by his side; Johnny's scraps had gone into it. At length the lad saw the shape of a pair of shoe-soles making themselves visible through the bag, which was now becoming pretty well filled; and remembering that at one of the houses where they had called, and where they had been kindly treated, a great number of boots, gentlemen's and ladies', stood on a table in the back kitchen, against the door of which the old man had stood, whilst the friendly cook and another servant were choosing a bottle-brush, a suspicion crossed his mind that one pair of those boots was now in the old man's bag. He stopped short and said so, threw down the remaining toasting-fork and bottle brush, and declared he would not go another step with him, for that he was a wicked old man and a thief; and demanding the money which he had paid for breakfast, and which he had promised him back, said they would part company, for he himself was an honest lad, and so their bargain was now at an end.

In the first instance the old man seemed fairly

staggered; he had not a word to say. Then he broke forth into the most violent and fearful language, threatening to give Johnny into the hands of the police for the very offence which he had charged upon himself. He snatched up the toasting-fork and bottle-brush, and stamped away with his lame leg, and face pallid with rage, in search, as he said, of the police. The people on the road looked after the furious old man, and as Johnny stood on the path where he had left him, a horrible fear struck him lest he really should be taken up; and, afraid to run in the sight of the people who had met the horrible old man, and might have heard his threat, he all at once, from the depths of his young soul, exclaimed, "O Lord and Saviour, help me!" and walked quietly on in the opposite direction to that in which the old man had gone, turned round the next corner, and ran with all his might, he knew not whither.

The first thing that stopped him was the remembrance that he had only one halfpenny in the world. His few clothes he had, it is true, and the contents of the nutmeg-grater, but he would have parted with his life sooner than with them.

He felt a strange sentiment in his soul, as of an unspeakable pity for himself, he was so utterly friendless, penniless, and forlorn. And now suddenly one of his beautiful school-pictures stood up, as it were, before memory, and seemed for the moment to shut out the blackness of his misery. It was the Lord walking on the stormy sea, and

putting forth His hand to save the despairing Peter; and instinctively the cry rose up in his soul, "Lord, save me, or I perish."

At length, late in the afternoon, Johnny found himself in one of the large West-end squares. All was quiet; no throng of jostling people on the pavement, nor rattle and rush of omnibuses or tradesmen's vehicles along the smoothly macadamised road, upon which the softly-rolling wheels of home-returning carriages made scarcely a sound.

In this general hush, poor weary Johnny became aware of a measured step, which could be no other than a policeman's behind him. A policeman was just then a bugbear to him, for he had not yet lost the terror inspired by the wicked old man. He therefore somewhat quickened his pace, that he might, without running, escape from sight by the first street opening out of the square. But the square was so large, and the lad so tired, that he was long in reaching it, and when he did so, and was about to relax his speed, the measured step was still behind him. The policeman had made the turn also.

Johnny hurried on, and came to one of those great thoroughfare crossings by which hundreds of gentlemen daily pass to and fro from their wealthy residences to take the omnibuses to their city places of business.

This crossing was held by an old man, who, having kept it for many years, was not only considered to have a settled right to it, but who being one of

the established characters of the neighbourhood, was patronised by all, especially by the gentlemen.

He was just now standing on the edge of the pavement, under a new-lighted gas-lamp, leaning on his besom and meditating a retreat, when Johnny passed him, and at the same time heard the awful voice of the policeman behind him, saying:

"Leaving off work, uncle?"

"Aye, James," drawled out the old man, and at the very instant Johnny felt the strong grip of the police on his shoulder.

His heart seemed to die within him, and turning hastily round, in a spasm of terror, he faced the tall policeman under the gas-lamp.

"Oh, please, sir!" he exclaimed, in piteous accents.

"Don't be frightened, my lad," said the kindly voice of the man; "I only want to know where you're going."

"Oh, please, sir!" again gasped Johnny.

"I've been following you for the last quarter of an hour," said he, rather peremptorily, "and I want to know where you're going."

"I don't know," replied Johnny. "I have nowhere to go to, sir."

"Well, where do you come from, then?"

Johnny told him of his disappointment at Clapham the day before, adding, "It is all true that I tell you, sir, and now I don't know where to go."

"Well, you come along with me," said the man, who, with an unusual degree of police acuteness, was convinced that the lad's artless story was true. "I'm off duty for to-day. I'm going home to my tea, and my missis 'll give you a cup, so come along."

The man went on with his solemn, measured step, like a piece of machinery at work, and Johnny, greatly comforted by the turn affairs had taken, walked by his side.

They were now in a street of shops and flaring gaslights, and the policeman, turning into a pork-butcher's, bought a pound of nice-looking sausages, which, wrapped in a paper, he carried in his hand.

Presently they turned into a somewhat dark mews, and going up a wooden flight of steps, the door at the top suddenly opened from within, and a bright light flashed forth, which seemed almost blinding.

A remarkably pretty and neatly-dressed young woman stood there with a baby in her arms. She had heard her husband coming, and now met him with a smiling welcome. He kissed her, and snatching the baby out of her arms, began kissing it and tossing it about, the baby crowing and laughing in merry chorus.

Johnny was forgotten, so were the sausages, which, however, he had given to his wife, who, opening the paper, said :

"These are for tea, are they ?"

"Lor ! I forgot," said he, settling the tumbled

baby straight in his arms. "I've brought you some company, Emma. Look here, mother, this little chap's to have some tea with us. Sit you down, my lad," said he, turning to Johnny, "and when he's got a bit of something comfortable inside of him, I'm going to catechise him, and see what prison I must send him to."

"Don't be frightened, my dear," said the neat-looking young wife. "He's so fond of his jokes. He'll do you no harm," added she, seeing the scared look in the poor lad's face, and noticing at the same time what a sorrowful yet beautiful young face it was. "Here's a nice low seat; come and sit down, my dear."

Johnny sat down, comforted and very grateful.

It was the prettiest room that Johnny had seen for many a long day, with pictures on the walls and flowering plants in the window, and the furniture brightly rubbed and in its place. He looked round and thought how nice it was.

The kettle was singing on the hob, the sausages were merrily frying in the pan, the tea-tray stood ready on the table, a third cup being now added; tea was brewing in a metal pot as bright as silver within the fender, in company with three plates, which were set to get hot. Bread and butter and milk were all ready.

The happy father, in the meantime, was still busy with the child, now rolling it about till it screamed with delight, and now nestling it in his arms and pretending to sing it to sleep.

Johnny saw it all. An atmosphere of love and comfort, warmer, and more cheering even than the warmth, was around him, and, before he was aware of it, his overstrained and already wearied frame and faculties were in deep sleep.

"Poor little fellow, he's fast asleep," said the man, when everything was ready.

"He's so tired," said the kind-hearted wife. "What a handsome lad he is! I declare he's quite a picture. Where did you find him, James?"

But now, with the baby tucked under his arm, he had his policeman grip again on Johnny's shoulder. Even that did not wake him, so he shook him rather roughly, and the poor lad, opening his eyes and at once collecting his scattered faculties, rose up, saying:

"I think I've been asleep."

The man laughed as if he had said the merriest thing in the world, and they all sat down to tea, Johnny thinking that neither the Lord Mayor nor Queen Victoria herself could have had a better.

When the meal was over, the policeman began his cross-questioning, but Johnny by this time had lost all his fear. So he told his story from beginning to end. He even produced the nutmeg-grater, which the policeman, at his request, released from his pocket with his penknife, and showed its sacred contents; also the little Bible, which formed as it were the very kernel of his bundle. He told about the happy time at Mr. Wiltshire's, and that it was he whom he had gone

"POOR LITTLE FELLOW, HE'S FAST ASLEEP."

the day before to find at Clapham, but discovered that he had left London. Then of the last night, in the shed amongst the ballast-hills, and the wicked old man who had robbed him of his money, and with whom he had had such a dreadful experience that very morning.

"Bless me!" said the policeman, when he came to this part of the story, "I know that old vagabond. We'll cut his walk short. Did you see him take the boots?"

Johnny explained exactly how it was.

"Can you swear to it? And should you know the house again where the boots were? It was down Kensington way, you say?" asked he, in a very official tone.

"Please, sir, I'd rather not. He's such a wicked old man," pleaded Johnny.

"No, James," said the wife, who had become a warm partisan of her young guest; "don't be in such a hurry. An old thief like that, if he steals boots to-day, will steal boots to-morrow. Just set one of your fellows to watch him; they'll soon have him for something else, and then this poor little lad needn't be brought up about it. I'm sure I should hate it, if I were in his place."

"Well," said the policeman, without replying to his wife, "and what next, my lad? He threatened to give you up to the police, and charge you with stealing the boots, did he? Very good!" and then he laughed, as if it were the rarest joke. "And so you ran away, and you thought I had you when

my hand was on your shoulder! I dare say you *did* feel as if you were all turned to stone!"

Thus they talked for half an hour after tea, and by that time Johnny had so far ingratiated himself into the favour of his entertainers that it was proposed that he should stay there over the night. The policeman's brother had lodged there till that very day: he could have his bed, and in the morning they would consider what had best be done for him: he might be sent to the Boys' Home, or entered into the Shoeblack Brigade, or something.

Before he was admitted, however, to the honour and comfort of a proper bed, with sheets and blankets, the young wife insisted on his being well washed; for after a night passed in the hay with that old thief, she feared he might be none of the cleanest.

So he had a warm bath in a large wash-tub, at which the handy policeman officiated; and then, in a clean shirt taken from his bundle, he lay down in such a comfortable little bed as, only a few hours ago, he could not have formed any idea of. And, to add to his comfort, the good, motherly young woman made it deliciously hot with a warming-pan, "for," said she, "there's nothing like warmth for resting one; besides, after his bath, a cold bed might give him a chill."

The policeman under whose roof Johnny was staying was named James Yates. He was a right good fellow, and so well-known for general good conduct that he was sure to be a sergeant

before the year was out. He was gifted with cool judgment and great discrimination of character, so that he could see through any amount of subterfuge, and was as little likely to be taken in as any man in London. With all this, he liked above everything to do a kind action. He was really as happy as a king in giving this poor, homeless, friendless lad a night's lodging; and his wife was just like him. So when they had seen the young stranger comfortably in bed, they sat down to talk over what they should do for him.

Having no question about his honesty and truth, they proposed to keep him over Sunday, by which time he would be thoroughly rested; whilst Yates would set on foot, through the police, inquiries both regarding the Wiltshires at Clapham and the Elliots at Hampstead; he would also ascertain where the old vagabond, with his tinware, was hiding, and have him carefully looked after, for nothing would please him better than to be the means of his capture.

His wife, who was a dressmaker, and had work to finish and send home by Saturday night, said that Johnny would be useful to her by nursing the baby, and helping her in various other ways, for he seemed a handy lad, and if he promised well, and they were satisfied with him, what did her husband think of his being a successor to uncle at the crossing?

Yates thought that was a not bad idea. But in order that you may understand what this means I

must explain that the old crossing-sweeper, whom I mentioned as standing by the lamp-post when the policeman overtook Johnny, and who was addressed by him as "uncle," stood truly in that relationship to the young wife. He had saved a rich, deaf old gentleman from being knocked down by a baker's cart at that crossing, and had now a little annuity from the family; besides which he had saved nobody knew how much money at that crossing, for it was a rich one. He had been talking for a long time of selling it, or farming it out, if he could get a good price for it, or meet with any one who sufficiently took his fancy. Now, therefore, Emma thought this boy would be just the thing; he was a good-looking, sharp lad, whom the old man would very likely take to. At all events, it was worth trying. Uncle was troubled this cold weather with rheumatism; the lad might take the crossing just for the winter, the old man staying with him a week or two, just till the gentlemen knew him—over Christmas, perhaps—so as to get the Christmas-boxes, for uncle always had an eye to the money.

Yates thought it was a good scheme, and undertook to mention it to the old man in the morning. In the meantime she would see what he was like through the Saturday.

Johnny was overjoyed to find that his new friends would allow him to stay with them over Sunday, and in the meantime look out for a place for him. But they said not a word of the plan

they had in view. He nursed the baby, and nursed it to the young mother's content, winning her heart still more by the delight which he gave to the child; so that by the time her husband came home for the evening, all her work was done, and she and Johnny had cleaned the house for Sunday.

One thing only troubled the lad, namely, that he could not write to his foster-mother as he had promised, and as he knew she would expect. But he could not write to her news which he knew would distress her, until he could counterbalance the disappointment by the good tidings that he had got a place and was well off.

Yates made the proposal to the old crossing-sweeper, who, as the weather was now so cold, seemed willing to entertain it. It was arranged, therefore, that he should come in and see the lad, and talk it over with him; and whilst they were having their tea Emma and her husband, delighted with their plan, made Johnny acquainted with it.

Johnny, I am half ashamed to say, did not receive the proposal quite as enthusiastically as they had hoped, and as they thought it deserved. They had unwisely prepared him for something which his imagination conceived to be very different to sweeping a crossing. He could not be in raptures.

They told him that the old man, Emma's own uncle, had made no end of money at that crossing:

he was going to leave it all to her, and he was so much respected!

Poor Johnny! It was only sweeping a crossing, after all. And how could he write it to his foster-mother? Wouldn't she think that he indeed was reduced to beggary? Why did they not think of something else for him better than that? He could not now write to her at all. He would wait a little while and see. They said he would get a great deal of money given him—more than he could earn in a place—even though he was to pay the old man half of what he got. He was to live with him, for he had a comfortable room of his own, and Emma said he should come and see them now and then, for they would always be glad to see him.

Johnny was very grateful to them for their kindness; but he was bitterly disappointed. Put it before him in what light they might, his foster-mother never would believe but that he had sunk down very low when he could get nothing better to do than to sweep a crossing; and without much stretch of imagination, he saw himself muddy and dirty and cold, with red fingers and a red nose, hopping about on the frozen pavement to keep himself warm.

"I dare say, poor little fellow, that it does seem rather low," said Emma to her husband, after the old man was gone, and all was arranged for beginning the next morning, and Johnny was in bed; "I dare say it does!"

"Beggars mustn't be choosers," said Yates. "What could he expect? When he has got some better clothes he must look out for himself, if this don't satisfy him."

The next morning Johnny began his new life. Emma gave him a good breakfast, and talked cheerfully to him about the lots of money he would be sure to get; and he must look in before going home, and tell her what sort of a day he had had. But one thing in particular she must say to him before he began. He must not mind if uncle seemed bad-tempered, nor notice his rough talking. It was only his way; and when once he got to know him well, he would not dislike him; but of one thing he might be sure, he would have plenty to eat, and uncle would do honestly by him to a farthing; and as soon as he could get a little bit of money she would buy him some warm new things; and then, when he was nice and smart, she would go with him up to Hampstead to see his mother (he always called her so) and Harriet; "and wouldn't that be nice!"

Johnny thought indeed it would, so he made up his mind that he would not write at present. She would think he was at Mrs. Wiltshire's, and thus she need not know that he was only a crossing-sweeper.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW MRS. ELLIOT WENT TO A PLACE OF WORSHIP, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

LEAVING Johnny to begin his new life with such satisfaction as he could, we must now go back to his friends in Taylor's Yard.

Mrs. Elliot, on her return from accompanying her foster-son about a mile on his way to seek his fortune, suddenly determined, sending Harriet direct home, to go round by Highgate, and call on a family where she had formerly been employed. She thought it as well to keep herself in their minds, for it used to be one of her best places. On her way thither, passing a place of worship, she saw the announcement that the Rev. Joshua Wiltshire would preach there on Sunday evening. This was a great joy, for, though it was some years since she had been to God's house, she would now make herself as clean and respectable as she could, and go and see this excellent man, and hear from his own lips all about Johnny. She used in her better days to have great faith in Providence. She once read the Rev. William Huntingdon's

life, which she had from the library, and she knew very well what he meant by the Bank of Faith.

The old trust in Providence seemed coming back to her, for was it not wonderful, she thought, that, just at this moment, the very preacher she wanted to see should be brought within her reach?

She called at the house where she used to work, was well received, invited to dinner with the servants, asked to do a few hours' work at once, for which she received a shilling, and then was engaged for three or four days the following week. Everything seemed falling out well for her.

She came home, therefore, in excellent spirits, having laid out her shilling on her way home in a few immediate necessaries. At home all had gone on well. An unusual amount of mangling had been done, and, for a wonder, her husband came in before tea-time quite sober.

Under the influence, therefore, of all these good things, she told him in a pleasant and cheerful tone that Johnny was gone to see Mr. and Mrs. Wiltshire, and she hoped they would find him a place, for they were always so fond of him; and how surprised and pleased she had been to see that Mr. Wiltshire was to preach in Kentish Town on Sunday evening; and she meant to go, and then she should hear what they could do for the poor lad, for she dared say he would not write before then.

It was quite a surprise to Elliot to hear that Johnny was gone, and, strange to say, he felt

a little troubled about it—a little conscience-stricken; and as his wife did not reproach him, nor cast it at him in any way that he had by his brutality as good as turned him out of doors, there was no need of him to work himself up into angry self-justification. She was so cheerful, and seemed to look at things so contentedly, that he had not a word to say. He sat silent, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, looking into the fire, and a touch of real pity and tenderness towards the lad whom he had so lately ill-treated on that very hearth, rose up in his soul and troubled him.

Perhaps, under its painful influence, he might have walked off to "The Chequers" to be rid of it by drink: he did indeed get up with the intention of going there, but tea was then ready; and though he said he hated tea, and that it never agreed with him, he sat down again and took it, saying not a word, but wishing that he had behaved rather better to the lad, and thinking that he would be sure to tell the Wiltshires, and they'd think what a brute he was. He did not, however, go to "The Chequers" that night. He grew sleepy and went to bed early, and altogether Mrs. Elliot had not felt so comfortable in her mind for years.

The master that Elliot was now working for paid his men at "The Chequers," so on Saturday night he came home drunk again. But there was no Johnny to abuse, and the next day he was very low and sullen, as usual. As afternoon came

on, and his wife talked of going to the house of God, he grew angry.

"Was she not ashamed of having sent the poor lad to Mr. Wiltshire's?" he asked. "He should have thought she would have had more pride."

She knew what he meant, and said, therefore, that Johnny would tell no tales out of school. She was sure he would not say a bad word of any of them, he was such a good lad.

Elliot's conscience, however, goaded him, and, impatient to silence its pricks, he got up from his chair and went to the door, as his wife in her bonnet and cloak came downstairs to go to the place of worship. For the moment she thought he was intending to go with her, and she was overjoyed. But it was not so, and the very suggestion enraged him.

As she turned out of the yard to the right, on her way to God's house, he slunk away to the left towards "The Chequers."

The building was crowded, and what a joy it was to Mrs. Elliot to sit and listen to the old beloved preacher, to hear once more his earnest prayers, which were so unlike any one else's, and to hear him give out the once familiar hymns! It was like a bit of the good old days to be sitting there and listening to it all. Nevertheless she could not keep her mind disengaged from her own heartfelt affairs. After the service she was going to talk with him, and suppose he should be vexed with her for sending Johnny to him, and think it a liberty, or suppose he could do nothing for him?

The nearer the service came to a close the more anxious and apprehensive she became.

At length it was over, the minister came down from his pulpit, and saw near the vestry door a poor, shabby-looking woman asking to speak with him. The deacons are with him and two or three gentlemen: she must wait a few minutes. Poor soul! It was a momentary relief, and she felt her heart beating violently.

At length he was at liberty to attend to her. She walked in and stood before him, but he did not recognise her.

"Oh, Mr. Wiltshire!" she exclaimed. "Pardon me, gentlemen, but, oh, sir, don't you remember me, Mrs. Elliot, a regular attendant at Clapham?"

"Elliot," repeated the minister, going back into his memory. "To be sure," and he offered her his hand. "And how are you, and your husband and family, and that dear little boy, whose mother died, and to whom you were so kind? I hope he he is well."

Anybody, as the saying is, might have knocked her down with a straw.

"Oh, Mr. Wiltshire!" she exclaimed, "haven't you seen him? Johnny Oriel, I mean."

"Not that I'm aware of," said the minister.

"He went on Thursday, sir, to find you out: I sent him, that is."

"No, my good woman, I have not seen him. He has never been near me."

"Oh, sir, sir!" cried she, and dropped down in a fainting fit.

The vestry was in confusion. The pew-openers, who were women, rushed in: there were ladies still in the place of worship, and water and smelling-bottles in plenty.

In the meantime the minister explained to his friends that this was one of his old Clapham hearers, though never in membership; but by her present appearance she must have sadly gone down in the world. He said that he had respect for her from her admirable conduct towards an orphan child that she adopted even when she had a family of her own, and evidently it was with reference to this boy, who must be now ten or twelve years of age, that she was here.

By this time she had recovered her consciousness, and he returned to her. She was now collected enough to tell what Johnny otherwise would have told; and having already heard that Mr. Wiltshire no longer resided in London, the most terrible anxiety took possession of her mind as to what had become of the poor lad. Although she said very little to implicate her husband, still she had confessed his increasing weakness for drink, and his violence when under its influence, and when no longer master of himself; also their unsuccess in endeavouring to find a place near home where the boy could do something towards getting his own living: hence it was that she had taken the liberty of sending him over to consult with Mr. and Mrs.

Wiltshire, from whom they both had formerly received so much kindness.

It was no use saying she should have written, or blaming her in any way for what, out of anxious affection for the boy, and in good faith in her former minister, she had done, for she was so much distressed, and so bitterly reproached herself, that neither he nor any of his friends could do other than endeavour to find grounds of comfort and assurance for her. Most likely he had found a place. She described him as having anxiously sought for one. She would be hearing from him before long, or he would be coming back. Unfortunately, said the preacher, he could do nothing himself, for he was returning home early in the morning. He had preached to his old congregation the Sunday before, and he trusted no harm had happened to the boy. He hoped she attended a place of worship regularly, and had a minister she could go to, who would advise her better than he was able.

In the midst of her distress she could not avoid seeing that he was in a hurry, and that several gentlemen stood outside the door waiting for him. He shook hands with her, prayed God to bless her and her family, in his old cordial way, and was gone.

She stood like one confounded. The pew-openers and two or three other women were still there, and they talked with her, and tried to comfort her, each in her own way, all agreeing that

the lad was sure to come back. Sharp, clever lads never did get lost in London, and they shouldn't wonder if she found him at home when she got there.

She reached home without having made up her mind what she was to say to her husband. Stephen was in bed; Harriet, who was only ten years of age, but a little old woman in the hard experience of life, was waiting anxiously for her mother. Elliot was not yet returned from "The Chequers." The first comfort the poor woman knew was to pour out her anxious troubles to Harriet. Harriet, of course, cried; but even she, like the women in God's house, did not believe that Johnny would come to any harm. He had got a place somewhere, and they would have a letter to say so—perhaps the letter would come to-morrow—and Johnny always said his prayers, and—if mother wouldn't cry so—and if father wouldn't go to "The Chequers," then—and at the very thought of a comfort that was not to be hoped for, Harriet herself could not help crying.

Elliot, though not drunk, because it was Sunday night, was yet half stupefied; he did not say a word about Johnny, and went to bed. Mrs. Elliot did not sleep a wink all night; sometimes driving herse f half distracted by conjuring up all kinds of horrors; then, again, agonizing her heart by thinking of Johnny's loving, winning little ways when he was a child, and how peculiarly hard and sorrowful his life had been of late. There was not

one thought out of which she could draw any consolation. Let her put it in whatever light she would, she could not now see it otherwise than that he had been turned out of doors, and if any harm came to him how could she ever forgive herself, and when and how was that long-hoped-for blessing, which Mr. Wiltshire had promised them years ago, ever to be looked for if she had failed in her duty?

In the morning she told her husband of the discovery she had made at the house of God, and now, with a strange feeling of relief, as if for the first time he could speak freely, he reproached her for sending the lad on a purposeless errand, saying he was thankful he had no hand in it; he was never consulted, and whatever came of it, whatever harm befell him, or whatever ill courses he took, she might thank herself. It was all her doing! As for himself, he would neither lift a finger nor stir a foot in the matter; and so saying, he left the house.

As she was not to begin her three days' work at Highgate till the morrow, she set off as soon as breakfast was over to Clapham; for, some way or other, she thought she might there either find or hear of the lad.

She reached Clapham, as he had done, and walking up the London road, passed the old familiar place of worship, and so on to the former home of the preacher. Nobody, so far, could give her the least intelligence. Johnny, she knew

would go to this house; therefore she went straight up to the well-known kitchen-door, rang, and asked had such a lad been there on Thursday, inquiring for Mr. Wiltshire.

It happened that the nursemaid had mentioned Johnny's inquiry to her fellow-servants. She spoke of him as a very handsome lad, though so poorly dressed, and said that he seemed "cut up when she told him the people he wanted didn't live there; she never was so sorry for any lad before."

It made tears come into Mrs. Elliot's eyes to hear anybody speak so of her Johnny, and this, the first word that she heard of him, was a key that at once unlocked her heart, and she told all her trouble. She was afraid he was lost, or drowned, or something had happened to him. She couldn't sleep at night, nor rest in the day; she thought she should lose her senses if she didn't find him.

The cook, a comfortable, middle-aged woman, who had had children and troubles of her own, proposed in the warmth of her sympathy to go and speak to her mistress, and ask if she might come in and rest. The mistress herself, no less kindly disposed than her cook, came into the kitchen and heard the mournful story over again, with fuller details, and of all Johnny's good qualities, his obedience and willingness to work, and how he wanted to get a place. On this the lady advised that she should ask at all the shops, beginning with those down the road, for that was

the way the nursemaid described him as going, and most likely she would hear of him, or perhaps even find him.

Acting on this suggestion, she came at length to the butcher's.

"A very nice-looking lad," said the butcher, in reply to her inquiry; "and if I'd known he wanted a place, I wouldn't have minded giving him a trial. But he only asked after Mr. Wiltshire, and where he was gone to. I noticed how knocked all of a heap like he seemed, and I said to my missis, I'd never seen a lad so cut up by a word before. Which way did he go? Why, up the road again. Yes, I'm sure he went up the road again. But you'd better ask the police; they're always going up and down, and noticing of things; and their eyes catch a stranger in a minute."

Up the road again went Mrs. Elliot right to the Common, just as Johnny had done; and here, meeting a policeman, she told him her trouble, and made the necessary inquiry. But he was not on this beat on Thursday. He advised her to go to the police-office, state the case, and have a search instituted. They would be sure to hear of him before long. "Yes, children were sometimes found drowned, sometimes were murdered, but not often."

This last remark was in reply to Mrs. Elliot's anxious suggestion as to Johnny's possible fate. After this she went to the police-office, and did as she was advised.

Elliot, in the meantime, who had said that he would neither lift a finger nor stir a foot towards finding Johnny, was not as bad as his threat. He was, truth to say, anxious as to the whereabouts of the lad; and thinking that probably he was gone to his foster-brother Dick, of whom he had always been very fond, and who now lived with a cowkeeper near Barnet, thither he went, without a word to anyone. He inquired all the way whether a boy answering Johnny's description had been seen on the road; but he could hear no tidings of him. Dick had never seen him; but as he and one of the men were again going to the cattle market, they undertook to make further inquiry.

Spite of himself, Elliot began to be uneasy, and determined next day to continue the search, secretly from his wife, however, for he felt a strange disinclination to let her know anything about his feelings on the subject. He would go to the ponds and waters of the neighbourhood, lest, by any chance, coming home late at night, now there was no moon, he had fallen in and was drowned. And in this, and other such fruitless search, three days were consumed.

CHAPTER VII.

JOHNNY SWEEPS HIS CROSSING, AND ENCOUNTERS FRIENDS.

THE old crossing-sweeper, as Emma had forewarned Johnny, had a queer temper of his own. He wanted to have a deputy whilst the cold weather lasted, and he had such respect for his vocation, in his own person, that he would not have allowed any but an efficient, and, so to speak, attractive vicegerent to reign in his stead. When, however, he saw Johnny, the singularly handsome lad, at his post, and observed the effect which he produced on the accustomed thoroughfare crossers, and with what favour he was received by some of his most special patrons, those who usually drove to town in their carriages being of the number, and that some of these had put their hands in their pockets and given him a piece of silver as an earnest of their approbation, something like jealousy crept into the old man's mind, and he was so hard to please, and so snappishly ill-tempered, that the poor lad's heart began to fail him.

But he stood it out bravely, swept the cleanest.

broadest possible crossing, and by always sweeping, contrived to keep himself tolerably warm, and it really was astonishing how the pence, and even the little silver coins, dropped into his hand. The old man stood by the lamp-post, and did a little sweeping himself, to show that he had not given up business, calculating up the while, and demanding to see every farthing that his deputy received.

So it went on for a week, the weather getting very bad the nearer it came to Christmas; cold, raw frosts every night, and cold raw fog in the day, that seemed to carry an icy chill to the very bone.

Johnny had quite enough to eat at the old man's, and a comfortable bed to sleep upon, but no sign of favour from him. The only enjoyment he knew was when he looked in at the policeman's before going home. By that time Yates was there, just as on the first evening, nursing the baby whilst Emma was preparing tea, and all as bright and cheerful as it was then. Johnny would have liked above everything to have stayed awhile, even though he had no tea, but they never pressed him to do so, knowing that it would vex the old man. So they only asked him what sort of a day he had had, and what had happened to him. On this he would empty his pockets and count over his receipts with them. The pleasantest thing that happened to him during the second week was, that all at once he was astonished, just as he

had finished a grand wavy pattern with his besom in the frost-dust of his crossing, to behold Mr. North, the greengrocer, driving along in a spring-cart.

"What's that *you*, Johnny?" shouted he, stopping his horse at once, and looking as if he had seen a piece of gold.

Johnny was astonished, and said, "Yes, sir," as he looked up.

"My missis and me has been a-looking for you! And so you're sweeping a crossing. Well, that's getting an honest penny. But I say, my lad, if you want a place, come to me. I've found out that was a bad sixpence, so here's a shilling for you. You should ha' come back, and not ha' been so hasty."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said Johnny, mounting on the step of the spring-cart to take the shilling.

"You know where I live," said the greengrocer. "You can come on Monday, if you like."

"Thank you, sir, but I must stop here," said Johnny.

"Oh, well, if you like it better," said he, and away went the spring-cart.

Johnny wished he could have explained why he could not go back to him; but it was such a long story, and he was in a hurry.

The old man was, as I have said, a very well-known character, and in his way well thought of by the families of the neighbourhood, the regular

morning and evening crossing gentlemen being termed by him his patrons.

All the gentlemen noticed the lad with kindness, whilst two or three of them thought it a pity that a lad of his appearance should have no better calling, and felt a desire to do something for him. One of these gentlemen was Mr. Coverdale, of the great world-famed firm of Coverdale, printers, men of immense wealth.

Mr. Coverdale generally drove in his handsome brougham, for he was one of the richest men thereabout. When, however, the roads were in that dreadfully slippery state in which London streets are so frequently in winter, he would not allow his horses to go out. The streets had been in this state for some days, and Mr. Coverdale therefore made use of the omnibus.

On the second Saturday morning, therefore, as Mr. Coverdale was seated in the omnibus, his neighbour, a lawyer, who had also felt an interest in the young crossing-sweeper, remarked to him that it was a pity so fine and intelligent a lad had not something better to do than sweep a crossing.

Mr. Coverdale said he had been thinking the same.

"Could you not make room for him in your place?" asked the lawyer. "In your business you want boys. I do not, or I would take him at once."

"We have at present, I believe, near two

hundred boys in our employment," said Mr. Coverdale.

"It would be the making of the lad," said the lawyer.

"We are very particular about them," returned Mr. Coverdale. "We require a degree of respectability; and yet," said he, correcting himself, "our two best youths, now indeed almost men, were, so to speak, picked up out of the streets. I'll see what we can do for this lad. I am glad you mentioned him."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE POLICE REPORT.

WE must again return to Johnny's friends in Taylor's Yard.

There had come a letter for Mrs. Elliot but not from her foster son. It was from good Mrs. Wiltshire, who, distressed by the news which her husband brought of the missing boy, and the sad change in Mrs. Elliot's circumstances, now sent her a post office order for twenty shillings, to purchase such articles of warmth and comfort as were most needed by herself and her children, Johnny included, for of course she hoped he was found by this time, and to whom she wished to be affectionately remembered.

The promptitude and kindness of this letter justified Mrs. Elliot in having sent the lad to her. Had they been still at Clapham, so she interpreted it, Johnny would not have been, as now, an outcast upon the face of the earth. Elliot himself never confessed this, and, strange to say, his anxiety about the boy, which he now confessed, was pro-

ducing a singular change in him. He still went to "The Chequers," but he had kept sober for the last week. The disappearance of their foster-child had become a common ground of anxiety on which the husband and wife now stood side by side.

She had a good sense not to reproach him for his ill-treatment of the lad, and he—his conscience not being quite slain, and not being called upon to justify himself to his wife—let the inward voice speak, and listened to it. I believe that his mental suffering during this time was very great, and it did him much good. He was influenced, too, in another way. By this time it was generally known that a boy was missing. Some of the more respectable inhabitants heard of it, and, supposing it to be his own son, spoke to Elliot on the subject, and then, hearing that he was an orphan whom they had brought up as one of the family, he gained commendation and commiseration ; and even work, from quarters where he would not have ventured to apply, was offered to him. It was not to be expected that he should confess the little share of credit which was justly his due ; but it must be acknowledged that even this undue commendation and consideration wrought a wonderful change in him.

His wife had often said truly, that if it would only please God to bless him with a little prosperity, to lift him up, poor, weak, drink-deluded man as he often was, out of the mud into which he had sunk, he would have a chance to rise. He

was easily depressed; he was one of those who, when once down, cannot rise again of themselves.

His wife saw, even amidst her sorrowful and still increasing anxiety on account of the boy, a spark of comfort springing out of this very sorrow as regarded her husband; he had not been as kind and considerate for her and the children for years as he was now. Thus the anxiety of the present moment was not without its blessing.

The police were on the track of Johnny: a little thread here and there had been picked up. He had been seen incidentally at Clapham on the Thursday; on the Friday he was conspicuous, not so much for himself as a companion, a notorious vagabond, who was variously known as a tramp; now as a model for artists, to whom his silver hair and beard were worth a shilling an hour; now as a dealer in small tin-wares, and a suspected petty thief. Johnny had breakfasted with him at Chelsea, and had been seen with him about Kensington at various houses during the day. Here a dark suspicion arose; various small articles, amongst others a pair of lady's boots, had been missed from the premises where they had been, the boy being suspected as his accomplice—a sort of decoy, who diverted the attention of the servants whilst the old man picked up any light articles he could lay his hand on.

Poor Johnny! If this were true, he stood under very suspicious circumstances. The police, it was understood, would take up the old man and his

artful young companion wherever they might be found.

The poor Elliots, who, through the police, were made acquainted with the progress of the search, were in an agony of distress when they heard this report, which, however, did not reach them till towards the beginning of the third week. But this could not be their Johnny!

"Well, no, perhaps not. There was no proof who it was as yet," said the police sergeant; "but it would soon be known."

Elliot was indignant at the idea outwardly, even more so than his wife. She was so frightened lest the poor lad had been forced into temptation by distress, yet she never confessed this fear to any one, for in truth her heart rejected it, and in an agony of silent suffering she incessantly prayed God to deliver him from evil. In the meantime the suspense was terrible. Should, by any sad possibility, this be true, then Elliot would drink again, and their misery and shame would be greater than ever, and how could she forgive herself for having sent the boy out into the world, which was so wicked and so full of temptation!

The poor woman wrestled, as it were, with God in prayer both for the boy and for her husband. Her troubles seemed more than she could support.

The police system is, as we know, an immense network all woven together, so that one touch on the remotest link can vibrate to the centre; but, strange to say it often needs gold to make the

movement rapid and effective. Touch it anywhere with a lump of gold, and it is vitalised in a wonderful way. No gold, however, touched it in this case. It had vibrated as far as Johnny was in company with the thief, as far as the thief stole the lady's boots from the wealthy house, and there it stopped, for the people of the wealthy house did not think the boots worth the trouble of searching after the thief; and there might have been an end of the whole thing, if it had not so happened that Johnny himself had been caught, like a little innocent fly, in the great police net.

The inquiry after the white-haired thief and his young accomplice came to the knowledge of Yates about ten days after it was set going, and by that time there was no urgency in it. To good James Yates, however, it suggested an importance much beyond hunting up the old vagabond, or the worth of twenty pairs of boots. He knew that it would reach, if it had not already done so the poor family to whom the boy whom he had made his *protégé* belonged. Now, therefore, not an hour must be lost in making their minds easy; for that they knew of the boy's disappointment and unsuccess at Clapham was proved by Mrs. Elliot, as he immediately ascertained through the police, having there originated the inquiry herself.

This was on Tuesday morning, and, singular to say, a great change was just then taking place in Johnny's fortunes.

Mr. Coverdale, who had taken a whole day to

MR. COVERDALE'S INVITATION TO JOHNNIE.

think over his kind intentions towards the deputy crossing-sweeper, and who, after that, had consulted satisfactorily with his brother on the same subject, desired the lad to come to his house in the evening, as he wished to speak with him.

"What was Mr. Coverdale saying to you?" asked the old man, as soon as that gentleman had passed on.

John told him, and all that day he was so short-tempered that it was miserable to be near him.

About four o'clock, therefore, when they usually left their stand, Johnny went to Yates's, not only with the intention of washing himself there, but of inquiring whether Emma had been able to buy him the new cap which it was decided should be the first purchase with his first money; also to tell them about Mr. Coverdale desiring to see him; and, if they asked him, to say also how very disagreeable the old man was making himself.

Emma, who wished nothing better than good fortune for the lad, let it come from what quarter it might, and who very well knew what a queer, awkward temper was that of her uncle, was delighted to hear that Mr. Coverdale wished to see him, and now did everything in her power to make him look his best. She had bought the new cloth cap, which set off his head to great advantage, though, of course, that would not do much for him in the presence of the gentleman to whom he was summoned.

He was not to go till seven o'clock; and, as

it happened, Yates was not back to tea, for he was detained at the police-office; so Johnny did not learn the bad news about himself just then, and he and Emma had tea together, she making him promise to come back the next day and tell her the result of the interview; for, as the old uncle went to bed before nine, it would not do, to call again that night.

Mr. Coverdale ordered John (I feel as if I must now cease to call him Johnny) to be taken to his library, the grandest place he had ever set his foot in, whilst the sight of Mr. Coverdale sitting there, in his handsome, large green morocco chair with his luxuriantly slippered feet on a large warm rug, which felt like a bed of moss before the fire, seemed almost to take the poor lad's breath away. All was so grand and rich, so soft and still—grander by far and very different to anything he ever saw at the Wiltshires'.

But Mr. Coverdale was kind in his manner, and led the boy, in the easiest way possible, to tell him everything about himself and his present circumstances. He did so, even to his disappointment at Clapham, his temporary association with the venerable thief, and his providential encounter with the kind-hearted policeman. Yet, as concerned his life with his foster-parents, he was careful, remembering his foster-mother's warning with regard to the hoped-for interview with Mr. Wiltshire, not to represent Elliot as bad as other men under the influence of drink.

Mr. Coverdale was one of the most strenuous advocates of temperance in London, and knew very well how even natures, kind and noble in themselves, may be transformed by drunkenness; therefore he understood everything.

At Mrs. Yates' suggestion, John took with him his Bible, which he had left in her care, and which was the only record he had of his father. Mr. Coverdale looked at it with deep interest, and a sentiment stronger than ordinary sympathy touched his heart for the boy who, while he seemed more than commonly gifted by nature, yet had been cast as a waif on life, dependent on people who were themselves, so to speak, suffering shipwreck.

By degrees, and not slowly either, John felt at his ease, for Mr. Coverdale's manners were unassuming and kind; therefore, when that gentleman placed pen, ink, and paper before him, desiring him to write his name and any little sentence that occurred to him, that he might judge of his ability so far, he did it without difficulty, though he certainly did not write his best. Again, when he was desired to read a few passages from a volume which Mr. Coverdale opened for that purpose, he complied without hesitation, though he felt his heart thumping violently, and his voice seemed strange to himself.

It was a long interview; but he saw that it was all tending to his good, and he thought if Mr. Coverdale did employ him in his great printing

office, what a letter he should be able to write to his dear foster-mother. He then would not even mind telling her about anything.

When the boy had passed through a severe examination—how severe it was he hardly knew, because he strove neither to conceal nor to disguise anything—Mr. Coverdale told him he would take him into the printing office, where he and his brother employed a great number of boys, and where at the same time he would have to attend evening school and a place of worship on Sunday, and be regularly trained, not only as a good printer, but, with the blessing of God, as a good man and a Christian.

John knew already all about the Messrs. Coverdale's wonderful printing establishment, for both Yates and the old crossing-sweeper had told him; and now his joy knew no mode of expression. To think that he was really and truly to be one of those privileged boys brought up not only to the utmost perfection in their noble trade, but who, as Yates said, need never look back as men, if they were only steady, after such a start in life!

John did not say much, for he really could not; but his beaming countenance showed both his joy and his gratitude, and that was enough. One little trouble he had, which he ventured to mention to Mr. Coverdale. He was bound to the old crossing-sweeper through the winter months. Mr. Coverdale smiled, and promised to make all right. He said he would have some talk with the old

man the next morning, and also that he would see the policeman's wife, because he must have decent clothing. Clean and wholesome and sufficient clothing, he said, were necessary for health, as well as for self-respect; therefore he must have those things; and he commissioned John to tell Mrs. Yates that he would look in and have some talk with her in the morning, for the sooner it was done the better.

John again was a little troubled; for he had no idea of having new clothes till he had worked for them, and he ventured to say so.

"We'll see about that," said Mr. Coverdale, smiling. "I do not wish to make a pauper of you; therefore, if I find you money for some decent clothing, you shall pay me back again."

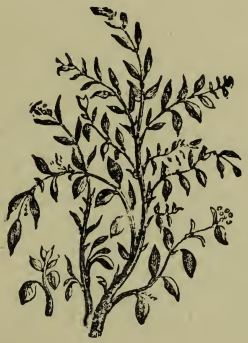
"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed the happy boy. "Now please, sir, may I go?"

"By all means," said Mr. Coverdale. "But remember, my lad, no more crossing-sweeping."

John rushed out: he almost flew. He never felt so wild with joy before in his life. He would have liked to have set off at once to Hampstead, to carry the good news to his dear foster-mother. He would have liked to call at the Yates', and tell them; but the church clock struck nine, and he did not dare, for the old man would be sitting up for him, and it would give him just cause for complaint. Therefore he went home direct, and found the old man at his supper of black-puddings. From some cause he too was later than usual.

John's portion stood within the fender, with an old basin turned over by way of cover.

In reply to the old man's questions he told him what Mr. Coverdale proposed, and the information was received much better then he expected. The truth was, he could not bear to see how great a favourite the lad was becoming, the very children even bringing him mince-pies. He thought he would be getting all the Christmas-boxes by the way in which he was going on; therefore it was a relief to know that he should thus honourably get rid of the boy; and yet Mr. Coverdale, one of his best patrons, would think it right to make up this loss to him in some way.



CHAPTER IX.

GREAT JOY IN TAYLOR'S YARD—JOHN ORIEL MAKES HIS START IN LIFE.

THE next morning Mr. Coverdale called on Mrs. Yates, and left with her two sovereigns, to buy John Oriel some new clothes. He also gave the old crossing-sweeper ten shillings, as a compensation for the loss of his deputy. Never was the old fellow better pleased since the day of his annuity, especially as Mr. Coverdale said this was independently of a Christmas-box.

John himself had gone early with his good news to the Yates'; and here he would have heard the bad police news about himself, had not Yates ordered his wife to keep silence till he returned from the police-office, where he went early, intending to obtain a day's leave of absence, and go at once with Johnny to Hampstead, and so set the mind of his foster-mother at rest, and also clear him from any possible implication with this charge at the police-office there.

Yates, who was known in his police district as one of its keenest and cleverest detectives, could

not be suspected of being imposed on in this affair. He was to be a sergeant directly, as they were well aware; he therefore knew what he was about. There could not be the shadow of a suspicion that the lad was other than he believed him to be. All his brother police therefore took quite an interest in the affair, and were ready at once to raise a little subscription amongst themselves to get the lad an outfit. Yates said that they might do so and welcome, for at that time he did not know of the money which Mr. Coverdale had provided. Thus John Oriel had new friends in all those blue-coated sturdy fellows who had, not so very long since, been terrible bugbears to him.

When Yates came back with his leave of absence, about an hour afterwards, and learned that Mr. Coverdale had not only taken Johnny into his employment, but had left money with Emma to buy him new clothes, and also found the boy there, he told him the terrible police suspicion, which they had every reason to suppose had reached Hampstead, and that therefore they must now both go there at once, so as to set the mind of his dear foster-mother at ease, as well as to convey to her the joyful tidings.

John was, of course, half mad with impatience to be off; but Yates insisted on doing the thing handsomely, and presenting him to his friends, not only safe and sound, but in a proper suit of new clothes, so that there should be no doubt about it.

It was now about seven o'clock in the evening.

and the weather very dismal; nor could anything much more cheerless and comfortable be conceived than the house in Taylor's Yard. Harriet and Stephen had been its occupants all day, with nothing but potatoes and salt for dinner. The mother, sorely troubled lest the police news should get abroad, had gone out charing. She had just come back, and had heard from the children the sad news that their father had never been in, not even to dinner; and the only woman who had brought clothes to mangle said he was at "The Chequers." The poor woman's heart seemed almost broken. Johnny, of a truth, she believed would never turn up again; he was either drowned, or murdered, or had gone to sea. Nothing more had been heard from the police-office, and she had not the heart to inquire.

She had just taken off her bonnet and cloak, stirred up the fire, and divided between the two children some broken victuals that had been given her, when the door suddenly opened, and in rushed Johnny, and behind him a tall policeman. Johnny had his arms round his foster-mother's neck, and was kissing her, when down she went in a fainting fit. She had seen the policeman, and she thought only that the boy was in his custody.

Yates, who had had all sorts of experience, knew what was necessary to do in such a case. Restoratives there were none in the house; but Harriet, who in every emergency had her wits about her, supplied plenty of cold water.

The next moment, having seen her mother restored and Johnny in all the bravery of his new attire, off she rushed to "The Chequers," shouting to the drinking men, amongst whom was her father:

"Johnny's come back, and he's a gentleman!"

The best remedy for all maladies of the heart is good news—is the fulfilment of our hopes.

As soon as Mrs. Elliot came to again she saw it. There was no delusion—no occasion for fear or shame. The real, living Johnny was there, looking, as Harriet said, like a gentleman, and as happy as a king. She hardly wanted to know how all this had come about. It was just what she had expected; what she sent the boy away for; what she had fondly pictured to herself over and over again. She had seen him over and over again, in her mind's eye, just like this; so she sat quietly holding his hand, and looking into his face, and now and then giving him a kiss, whilst he was telling her all that had happened to him to which she never replied, and hardly seemed listening.

Presently Elliot came in, and then she got up and busied herself about household things. Elliot was not drunk, but elevated; and talked a great deal, and asked numerous questions. He was, in his foolish way, very grateful, and wanted to give Yates a glass at "The Chequers." In the meantime poor Mrs. Elliot, impelled by the same sentiment, had sent Harriet to make astonishing

purchases—bread and cheese, and a pound of cooked ham; whilst Johnny, well knowing the poverty of the house, could not understand how it was managed; but he was too good-mannered, before his new friend the policeman, to shame, even by a question, the astounding hospitality of his dear foster-mother.

The truth was, that Mrs. Wiltshire's sovereign had been kept sacredly unbroken for Johnny's needs, whatever they might be. And now here he was, not as the prodigal son; "and if," thought she to herself, "the fatted calf was killed for the prodigal, and there was feasting and great rejoicing on his account, how much more should not I rejoice for my Johnny, who never gave me an hour's grief in all his life?"

Therefore, Harriet, the little, old, experienced woman of eleven, was privately called aside and sent out to provide these things, and everywhere that she went her face beamed like the sun, and she told with tears of joy in her eyes:

"Johnny is come back safe and sound, and quite a gentleman!"

* * * * *

After all his troubles, "John Oriel's Start in Life" was made under the most favourable auspices. He entered into the Messrs. Coverdale's employment the Monday after Christmas. He lived in the large, well-regulated home provided for such boys as were either without a natural home,

or to whom it was most convenient to be housed there.

There were eighty of this class. They had a master and matron in the house, who stood in the position of parents to the boys. The work was graduated according to their ability. All had to attend school, and there the opportunity was afforded of studying many branches of knowledge. They had occasional lectures on scientific or popular subjects given to them by able men, besides music and entertaining evening-readings and other amusements during the winter, and, in summer, holidays and excursions. All were made useful in the great printing establishment, and such as desired to remain printers as they became more skilled were so employed, whilst others emigrated, or were drafted into other employments connected with the printing business—as paper-making, type-founding, etc.

As James Yates had said, no man who was steady and capable need ever look back if he only started in life with the Messrs. Coverdale.

Mr. Bernard Coverdale, under whose care the boys especially were, and who took a never-ceasing interest in their welfare, did not satisfy himself alone with establishing John, but extended his kind, saving influence also to his friends.

From the day when he learned all necessary particulars regarding Elliot—and a very little talk with the wife effected this—he determined to attempt his reformation, the first step towards which

was by removing him from his evil associates and enabling him to begin life again under more favourable circumstances.

"I am so down in the mud, so up to the neck in it, as I may say," said Elliot himself when good Mr. Bernard Coverdale talked with him; and the poor man, really touched by this gentleman's kindness and sympathy, felt such a desire to make a new start in life as he had never felt before.

It was speedily determined, therefore, that the Elliots should leave Taylor's Yard and remove into one of Mr. Bernard Coverdale's houses, mangle and all. Employment of an uninterrupted kind was obtained for him, and as there was no mangle in the immediate neighbourhood, Mrs. Elliot had soon so much to do as would have paid for her mangle over and over again. In this new home they had plenty of good air, light, and water. It was like being in Paradise after Taylor's Yard.

Harriet and Stephen now went to school regularly, and when Dick, who had been out of place several times of late, came home till he found something else, he declared he should not have known any of them, they looked so well, and always better every time he saw them.

As sobriety was the law with Mr. Coverdale, Elliot had to keep a strict guard over himself, and at first it was not an easy matter for him to resist temptation, especially now, when he had mostly money in his pocket. Fortunately, however, the master with whom he worked paid his men on

the Friday night at the builder's office, and not at the public-house, for he was as staunch an upholder of temperance as the Coverdales themselves. All his fellow-workmen, too, were sober men, some of them pledged teetotalers; therefore he was not met at every turn by a tempter. When he was betrayed into the old course—and this, at first, happened now and then—his repentance was bitter and sincere, and every time he was able to resist temptation, the less power it had over him afterwards. Thus he gradually became master of himself, and, being so, gained self-respect and the respect of his fellow-men.

Long before this time, indeed immediately after entering Messrs. Coverdale's employment, Johnny wrote to Mrs. Wiltshire to tell her all the good fortune that had befallen him, and, later on, that of his friends. In reply, she said she rejoiced, for that now assuredly his foster-father would see that God is not a man that He should lie. "Hath He not promised, and shall He not make it good?"

Elliot did not need to be reminded of this. He himself had already acknowledged it, and this it was which first awoke in his heart a real trust in God, for he saw of a truth that His promises did not fail.

One of the annual holidays or vacations, of about a week's duration, which the Messrs. Coverdale allowed to such of their youths as had friends at a distance, and to whom a visit of this

kind would be acceptable and convenient, was spent by John at his friend's, Mr. Wiltshire, by invitation. It seemed to him that this was indeed a realization of being fed by the Saviour. It was in every respect a happy time; and, to his surprise, he found himself not treated as an inferior by these good Christian people: but taking his meals with them, and walking by their side, as a son might have done, as they went to God's house, or made with him little walks of pleasure into the town or the surrounding neighbourhood.

This visit produced a very marked and beneficial effect on the lad, in so far as it called forth his own self-respect; and, modest and unassuming as he naturally was, he returned to his employers and his associates, strengthened in his growing manhood, and with a still higher sense of moral responsibility, as well as of Christian duty.

A few more words, and I have done.

John Oriel had a great desire to discover his own father, and, the name being peculiar, his friend, Mr. Bernard Coverdale, endeavoured by this means to make the discovery.

All that was known to begin with was, that in a certain year a certain John Oriel emigrated to Canada. With this little thread in his hand, Mr. Bernard Coverdale began the inquiry. But it was upwards of four years before it led him to the true John Oriel, the solitary settler near London, in West Canada, a man who was prosperous and well thought of, but who, to the surprise of all his

friendly, hospitable neighbours, all of whom had comfortable large families, never married, having lost his wife years ago in some melancholy way.

Our John was then in his seventeenth year, a tall, handsome youth, apprenticed to the printing business. He, however, wrote at once a letter of deep affection to his father, which Mr. Bernard Coverdale accompanied by one from himself, giving such report of the youth as would gladden any father's heart. A very correct photograph of his son was also enclosed to him.

Instead of replying to this letter by post, the overjoyed, solitary man, who now had received an answer to the prayer of many years, came himself to take the blessing and to embrace the son whom God had given him.

It was such a meeting as can hardly be imagined for joy and thanksgiving; the father in the son recognising the young beloved wife of his youth, and the son finding in the father a tender-spirited man of many sorrows, but at the same time cheerful-hearted, coming as it were fresh out of the woods, and bringing a strong, wholesome atmosphere of life about him.

He took lodgings near the Elliots, to whom he was unbounded in his kindness, and his son lived with him. But he loved Canada and his free life there, and his desire was to return and there to establish his son.

John, however, wished to remain out his time with the Coverdales; but poor Dick, his foster-

brother, who had no taste for a town life, and had been sadly knocked about, as the phrase is, for the last few years, and who of late had had nothing but bad and profitless places, accepted joyfully the offer which Oriel made him to return with him to Canada, where they would clear land and build a good house against the time when John came out to them.

In some respects Dick was better suited to the Canadian farmer than his own son, and Dick himself was perfectly wild with delight in the prospect of emigration, whilst Oriel was happy in thinking that he should return to his beloved Canada enriched with two sons instead of one.

Need I say more than that the foster-brothers are now both prospering there? And Oriel the elder says on that side of the Atlantic, as Mrs. Elliot on this, "God will never fail us if we only put our trust in Him."

THE END.

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